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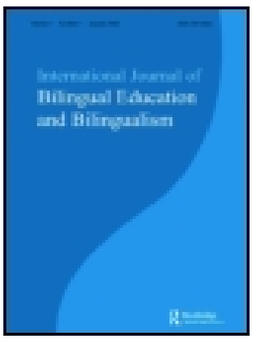

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Business English students' multifaceted and contradictory perceptions of intercultural communication education (ICE) at a Chinese University*

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communication education (ICE) is occurring in different departments and faculties of higher education globally. Yet, there is a lack of research on how this complex field is perceived by both teachers and students. The same goes for the perceptions of the ideal teacher of the subject. This article proposes to fill these gaps by problematizing current discussions about ICE. First, the article presents an overview of the field and shows how polysemic, ideologically and politically oriented ICE is. Based on focus groups with Chinese students of Business English at a Chinese university, this case study examines how they discuss, construct and perceive, on the one hand, the idea of *intercultural communication* as a subject, and on the other, those who teach it. ICE is multifaceted in Chinese higher education and we do not claim to generalize for the field as a whole in this paper. Based on a dialogical approach to students' discourses, the results show that they do not seem to have a uniform and coherent way of representing intercultural communication. As far as teachers of the subject are concerned, native/non-native and Chinese/non-Chinese dichotomies seem to dominate. Implications are discussed for the future of ICE in higher education.

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Business English; China; intercultural communication education; dialogism

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication as a subject is increasingly taught in different academic fields around the world (teacher education, communication, health, business, amongst others), either as an elective or a compulsory subject (Tournebise 2012). In this paper, we refer to this phenomenon as *Intercultural Communication Education (ICE)*. Born 'officially' in the 1950s through the work of American anthropologist E. T. Hall, the field of intercultural communication is multifaceted and multidisciplinary. Yet, it is still dominated by many popular Western-centric models that claim to describe, analyze and capture what is meant by the intercultural (for example, Landis, Bennett, and Bennett 2004; Byram 2008; Deardorff 2009). Critical voices have emerged from different parts of the world over the past decades, to criticize these models and to try to change their culturalist, differentialist and monological tendencies (e.g. Shi-xu 2001; McSweeney 2002; Hoff 2017). With the current push of supranational institutions like the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2018) and the Organization

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for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2018), the inclusion of intercultural components has now become global in educational rankings (Simpson and Dervin 2019b). China, the context of this study, is no exception to the rule. Interculturality is integrated in many programs of study in higher education, especially in language programs. With the current 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative, interests in ICE is bound to become a major educational interest in China. Although there are thousands of initiatives to promote ICE, very little is known of its complexities in the Middle Kingdom.

In this paper, we examine how Chinese students perceive, on the one hand, intercultural communication as a university subject and, on the other, the professionals who are/should be teaching it at university. This inquiry takes note of the emergence of Business English (BE) undergraduate programs in Chinese universities which were transformed from English studies programs. BE programs focus more on business communication through English and were established to meet the need for intercultural encounters in globalized contexts. Thus, intercultural communication has become an important part of the program objectives. The study was conducted in one of these BE programs at a university in Shanghai, in which an intercultural communication course has been offered as a compulsory course since 2009.

Based on focus groups with students from this program about their views and experiences of ICE, which allow multivoicedness to emerge between individuals and from within each of these individuals, this case study intends to answer the following questions: (1) How do the students construct and perceive ICE? What perspectives do they seem to refer to? What interests do they have in it? (2) As Business English students, who work with different kinds of teachers (language teachers, teachers of business, native/non-native teachers), what are their views on the kind of teacher of ICE? How coherent is that to their perceptions of ICE? We use a specific form of discourse analysis to analyze the students' discourses. This dialogical perspective, derived from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981, 2012), allows 'digging' under the surface of discourses by making it possible for us to identify some of the 'unsaid' of the co-construction of discourses. As a qualitative method, it is not meant to help us generalize about the students' experiences of ICE and views on IC teachers, but identify continua of perspectives, contradictions and (re-) positionings. Discourses on ICE are always ideological in the sense that they relate to the glocal socio-economico-political zeitgeist, which forms some of the 'ready-to-think' about interculturality in (amongst others) textbooks, teaching materials and the specific training received by IC teachers (Dervin 2016; Piller 2017).

Although we realize that a case study from the subfield of intercultural business communication cannot inform of the whole situation of ICE in China (which is in fact very complex, see e.g. Wang, Deardorff, and Kulich 2017; Yuan et al. 2020), based on our knowledge and manifold experiences of the field in this context, we believe that multi-perspectival answers to the questions we ask in this paper will sound familiar to many Chinese (but also international, up to a point) international educators. We end the paper by making recommendations as to how to move on with ICE.

2. Interculturality as a polysemic and ideological notion in education

Let us start with a very important argument about the notion of interculturality: any perspective and discourse on such a thorny and polysemic issue is always ideological and political. Intercultural communication deals with implicitly/explicitly (amongst others) how we see and understand the world today and tomorrow, the value of different kinds of others and our own value. The aspects cannot but be dealt with politically and ideologically, and require positioning. That's probably why there is a 'smorgasbord' of perspectives on interculturality (see Ferri 2018 where she proposes a review of some of these views), which often goes beyond, for example, the mere dichotomy of 'multicultural' versus 'intercultural' (see e.g. Mansouri and Modood 2020). Scholars' and educators' own education and training, beliefs, life experiences and worldviews will impact how they define, understand, examine, negotiate and teach the notion. These are also very much influenced by glocal politics, for instance, they might be guided by (or reject) local politics, specific economic perspectives (e.g. neo-liberalism) as well as discourses from supranational institutions such as the European Union,

the OECD and the Council of Europe. This means that, at times, their perspectives are partial, 'rebellious' and/or contradictory, especially when they combine differing ideologies. In his work, Dervin (2016) has labeled the latter 'Janusian' perspectives, in reference to the two-faced God. So how could we analyze students' discourses about ICE when those who provide them with knowledge and intercultural skills may have many and varied ways of thinking about interculturality? In what follows there is thus a need to review briefly some of the current perspectives on interculturality. These will help us gauge the ways the students discuss what they have learnt and how they engage with the way they see a 'good' teacher of IC.

2.1. Research and practice beliefs about interculturality

When one teaches IC, one needs to be aware of the aforementioned 'smorgasbord' of perspectives on interculturality (see Ferri 2018). In this section, we focus on two categories, which we label *Eurocentric culturalism-differentialism* and *renewed interculturality*. These perspectives, and the gaps between them, have grown radically over the last decade. As they differ in the way IC is conceptualized and problematized, the ideologies developed by learners when they learn IC will also fluctuate.

In their international bibliometric analysis for the knowledge of intercultural competence (a central concept in ICE) between 2000 and 2018, Peng, Zhu, and Wu (2020) note that the first five highly cited authors are all white British and American scholars. Although their ideologies might differ slightly, because of their potentially distinct scientific, political and economic 'tribes' (Yuan et al. 2020), the voice of these scholars is omnipresent in global studies of ICE – including in China. The majority of existing research on the intercultural is confined to M. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997) and using that model to assess intercultural competence. 'Popular' models like this one can be viewed as deriving from Eurocentric culturalist ideologies, whereby (national) culture is used as the exclusive way of understanding what people do when they meet others. Other factors tend to be ignored (Hoff 2017). Such perspectives also tend to create some form of border between 'us' and 'them' (Pieterse 2001, 221), emphasizing (cultural) difference over similarity as well as national, ethnic and/or religious identities over the intersection of, for example, gender and social class, which matter in interculturality too. The comparative work that produces these intercultural differences creates hierarchies between groups based on objectivizing criteria such as use of space, politeness and punctuality. Geert Hofstede's categorizing work has been very influencial in this sense (see McSweeney 2002 for a critique of his ideas). A lack of concern for researchers' and educators' reflexivity and sense of epistemological justice, i.e. an authentic wish to look for alternative ways of understanding and explaining interculturality, often accompanies the Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist perspective.

Over the past decade, the multifaceted field of ICE has witnessed many shifts. Forms of 'renewed' interculturality were put forward by, for example, Dervin (2011), Dervin and Risager (2014), Holliday (2011, 2013), Holmes (2014), Machart, Dervin, and Gao (2015) and Piller (2017) and their predecessors such as Abdallah-Pretceille (1986) and Sarangi (1994). Influenced by postmodern thinking, critiques of the concept of culture from anthropology and intersectional thinking, they all represent a somewhat coherent understanding of interculturality, which is based on questioning the terms, concepts and notions that are used to discuss interculturality, moving away from Western-centric (and other kinds of centrisms), somewhat biased and limited/limiting discourses, misleading us to believe that we are more 'civilized', or 'better' than the Other (Phillips 2005). In what follows we present three core critiques that renewed interculturality has discussed.

The first critical aspect we identify relates to the bias introduced earlier: the *differentialist bias*, 'or an obsession with what makes us different from others, rather than considering the continuum of differences and commonalities' (Dervin 2016, 35). If differences are exclusively only what you wish to see in ICE teaching and research, then the difference is all you will see. We are not saying differences do not matter, they do, but it is important to recognize that we may share similarities in terms of our experiences, beliefs, identities, etc. in intercultural encounters (Abdallah-Pretceille 1986).

Renewed interculturality breaks down the borders between difference and similarity and take both into account in examining encounters.

Moreover, the second critique we identify is exclusivity given to culture as a single analytical category and sole marker of interculturality (Dervin 2017). One of the ways one can move beyond these logics and practices can be through drawing inspiration from adjacent fields, e.g. sociology, in terms of how it has embraced intersectionality as a key component in understanding identities and social relationships. Intersectionality can be understood as 'the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations' (McCall 2005, 1771). An intersectional approach for interculturality means taking into account the symbiotic relationships of other aspects such as language, social class, gender and pushing for more political approaches that delve into issues of inequality/inequity and social justice (Sorrells 2015; Simpson and Dervin 2019c). Renewed interculturality thus makes ICE analyses more complex and relates them to the structure, politics and the economy – this is a departure from 'a-political' conceptualizations that relate IC to 'culture' and 'cultural differences', instead, this perspective focuses on examining the impact of power differentials from a more multifaceted perspective.

The third critique we identify relates to the oversimplification and/or generalization of contexts and interlocutors in ICE. 'The belief in individuals' discourses as discourses of 'truth' remains a problem in the field' (Dervin 2017, 66). The key concepts and notions contained in ICE often contain multiple voices (e.g. different speaker stances and roles, different speaker identities, different ideological positions) in the ways interlocutors (e.g. teachers and students) express, negotiate and co-construct meanings within given contexts. ICE research and teaching must go beyond mere 'ventriloquism' (i.e. appropriating others' words for one's use and purpose) in terms of how interculturality is described and constructed (Simpson and Dervin 2017). The failure to continually problematize discourses and their relations about ICE can be problematic as interactions and conversations can act as a *de facto* lip service for how interculturality *is* or how it *ought* to be (which can be manipulated ideologically). Renewed interculturality claims that ICE should prepare students for these phenomena. The more aware they become of their own experience of and participation in contradictory and conflicting voices, the more they could be ready to accept that the Other takes part in these too – and that they are more complex than often assumed. At the moment, most intercultural research and practice tends to rely on narratives as 'objective' and 'truthful' accounts (Tournebise 2013).

To summarize, in order to look into students' perceptions of ICE and teachers in this paper, we will use the characteristics of the two categories of *Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist* and *renewed interculturality* as lenses for identifying positioning towards intercultural ideologies. Table 1 summarizes the components of these two perspectives. It is important to note that these represent ideal-types and that interculturalists might navigate between the two categories when teaching, learning, researching and/or experiencing interculturality (hence the arrows between the components, indicating potential flows).

2.2. Perceptions of teachers of IC

As asserted earlier, those who research and teach interculturality face many challenges since the very idea of interculturality is polysemic and ideological. What is more there is a lack of systematic IC teacher education and training around the world, which means that most teachers have to 'improvise' their teaching by relying on textbooks, or materials they collect and combine – often from sources that could pass as incompatible ideologically, combining some of the elements found in Table 1 (Tournebise 2012). Studies on how ICE is perceived by the users (teachers but also students) are rather scarce, especially in the Chinese context. Internationally, the majority of current studies place particular emphasis on assessing teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs voiced towards intercultural teaching (Sercu 2006; Young and Sachdev 2011; Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011). The results show that most language teachers have a positive attitude towards integrating

Table 1. Components of intercultural perspectives.

Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist	Renewed interculturality
Emphasis on (national) culture	Intersectionality as a way of complexifying analyses of intercultural situations
Emphasis on (cultural/national) difference	Work between difference and similarity
Creation of borders between 'us' and 'them	Imagined borders that emphasize difference are questioned
Objectivizing knowledge	Knowledge is co-constructed by persons. 'Truth' is an unstable reality
Lack of concern for researchers' and educators' reflexivity	Reflexivity and criticality are central
Western-centric perspectives	Sense of epistomological justice: inclusion of other knowledge about interculturality

culture into their language classroom but still consider culture teaching as 'peripheral to the commonly accepted linguistic goals of foreign language education' (Sercu 2006, 86). They also tend to deliver 'factual knowledge' (often ideologies) about L2 culture in a teacher-centered approach and pay limited attention to developing intercultural awareness. Such findings echo Gu's (2016) research that was a large-scale questionnaire conducted among English teachers in China. Furthermore, some of the Chinese English language teachers were found to have misconceptualizations about culture that were confined exclusively to mainstream English-speaking countries (Gu 2016). Despite that, we have limited knowledge of how teachers of intercultural communication are projected. One rare example is Ghanem (2015) who shows that being a native and non-native speaker of the target language carries influence on the self-perception of teachers of intercultural communication. They found that native-speaking teachers perceived themselves as the authorities, ignoring the dynamic and complex nature of culture, whereas, non-native-speaking teachers felt less authoritative in culture teaching (Ghanem 2015). In their 2013 article, Dervin and Tournebise observed how the 'intercultural' is conceptualized by lecturers of intercultural communication education in the Nordic country of Finland (Dervin and Tournebise 2013). Their analysis shows that these practitioners, who were also researchers specialized in intercultural communication, shared discourses about the importance of the 'intercultural' but were unable to clearly position themselves within existing polysemic definitions and approaches. Another study on an Indonesian teacher of intercultural communication revealed that even if the individual teacher endeavored to open up a dialogue about interculturalism, her effort was constrained by other cultural and institutional practices such as 'essentialist framings of Indonesian culture or the English speaking 'Other'' (Gandana and Parr 2013, 241). The three aforementioned studies suggest gaps between research and practice in many contexts, which may be affected by institutional, curriculum and ideological/political factors. To carry on the discussion, we are interested in students' view of these teachers and their needs to be met in the classroom. We approach the question from the students' perceptions of ICE: how do they talk about and construct it? What kind of teacher do they suggest would be best at teaching it and how does this fit with their perceptions of ICE?

3. Dialogism as a method for examining discourses on ICE

Since discourses on interculturality within ICE relate to ideology and politics, and can be multifaceted and unstable, we have decided to use a specific form of discourse analysis to examine our data: dialogism. Our interest in this method is based on the fact that a dialogical approach to discourse analysis can help move beyond the surface of discourse and to unearth positionings as well as

contradictions (instead of 'regularities'). One of the ways is through Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981, 2012). In previous papers, we have articulated our dialogical method for ICE and the importance of using this approach for both researchers and teachers (Simpson and Dervin 2019a, 2019c). Dialogism is a characteristic epistemological mode of *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin 1981, 2012, XXX). *Raznorechie* (Bakhtin 2012) or what has been referred to as 'heteroglossia' (from Greek heteros 'other' + Greek glōssa 'tongue, language') (Bakhtin 1981, 1984) refers to the coexistence of a multiplicity of various struggling language-forms and voices (Simpson and Dervin 2019c). Dialogism denies a monological conceptualization of language – whether that be the unitariness of a national language, or the conceptualization of the internal language within the self (one's own discourse and voice) as unitary (Bakhtin 2012). Dialogism, on the contrary, shows the interplay of many, often competing, voices and discourses within the self which are located within one's utterances (e.g. accents, ideologies, voice registers). Dialogism also means that there is a constant interaction between the meanings of words, all of which have the potential of conditioning the self and others (Bakhtin 2012). For example, within conversations, speaker utterances react to preceding utterances and anticipate further utterances by interlocutors within discursive settings (Bakhtin 1981, 2012; Simpson and Dervin 2019a). The Russian linguist Valentin Vološinov echoes Bakhtin's dialogism, Vološinov defines reported speech as:

> speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance. (Vološinov [1929] 1985, 115)

The importance of a dialogical approach for ICE is that the approach can reveal the coexistence of a multiplicity of various struggling ideologies contained within intercultural encounters and contexts (XXX). This approach focuses on co-analyzing (e.g. self–other, subject–object) interaction through problematizing (a continuous back and forth movement) and decontextualizing discursive acts (e.g. speech, text, images, symbolic representations etc.). For Bakhtin (1981, 2012), the words one utters are never one's own, they are always co-constructed with others, and by others. Through discourse (speech and text), it is the terrains across and within overlapping and multiple voices are performed, negotiated and co-actioned by interlocutors within interaction. As a result, language reflects, not subjective, psychological vacillations, but stable social interrelationships among speakers (Bakhtin 1981, 2012).

As a result, language reflects, not subjective, psychological vacillations, but stable social interrelationships among speakers (Bakhtin 1981, 2012). To illustrate our argument, we analyzed data taken from focus groups with business English major students who are expected to study intercultural communication as a subject in the program and experience intercultural communication in their future workplaces. The choice of the focus group method (including four students in each group) goes hand in hand with dialogism as it allows scholars to examine in-depth how participants negotiate and co-construct meanings, opinions, definitions and epistemologies together. For Marková et al. (2007, 22), dialogue in focus groups leads to 'an open and heterogeneous interplay of multiple meanings and voices in continuous tension'. What is more, participants change positions during focus groups (speakers, listeners, disrupters, confirmers, etc.) (Marková et al. 2007, 202). Marková et al. (2007, 43) add that what individuals assert in dialogue can differ from what they would claim as an individual. As the object of research here, interculturality, is multifaceted, both dialogism and focus groups seem to fit well as methodological lenses in this paper.

4. The study

4.1. Data collection and analysis

As part of an ongoing project on ICE in China, the study reports on the data of focus group interviews with eight students who major in business English in a Chinese university. The school was chosen because it is one of the pioneers to offer business English program in China starting from 2009

and ICE has been an essential component of the program. In addition to the fact that many of the courses in the program like 'international business negotiation' entails intercultural communication elements, the students take 'intercultural business communication' as a compulsory course lasting for 16 weeks. Moreover, the faculty with which the program is affiliated offers optional summer programs on intercultural communication.

Two focus group discussions were conducted for the study. Marková et al. (2007, 2) define focus groups as 'situated communication activities in which we can examine language, thinking and knowledge in action and so they provide manifold research opportunities for taking a dynamic research perspective.' Two focus groups [coded as F1/F2] were organized at the University. Each focus group had four student participants (students are labeled as P1–P4 for the first focus group and P1b–P4b for the second). Focus group 1 lasted around 1.5 h, while focus group 2 lasted 1 h. The students were all third-year female students, specializing in Business English. They were recommended to us by colleagues who had taught them IC and found them to be active and with a big interest in ICE. They all had taken one course of IC in their home institution, with Chinese teachers of English who delivered lectures in English on IC. The focus groups were conducted in the medium of English while the students were also allowed to speak Chinese, their L1, whenever they wanted.

This is how we justify the fact that we used data from two just focus groups in this paper: (1) Focus groups represent complex research data. Even though they are 'assembled with a demographically homogeneous membership' (Marková et al. 2007, 46), we are interested in each of the participants' 'heterogeneities of thinking and talking' (Marková et al. 2007). Dialogic discourse analysis requires examining the multiple voices embedded in the participants' co-constructed discourses. These voices go well beyond those appearing on the surface of discourses (e.g. the participants' or the explicit voices that they refer to or quote). Marková et al. (2007, 27) explain this phenomenon as follows: 'Participants in focus groups are members of many other groups, which not only cross-fertilise but also obliterate and misconstrue one another'. This means that what the participants utter during the discussions must not be taken at face value but considered as co-constructed by the (implicit/explicit) presence of others and the context of the focus groups (the university campus). Issues of trustworthiness are thus somewhat irrelevant here since our analytical method looks into the variations, contradictions and performances of the participants when they discuss an object of discourse, ICE, which is always ideological. Our objective is not to reveal some 'truth' about what the students think or have experienced but to allow the potential multiplicity of meanings and positions attached to interculturality to emerge. This means that, at times, we speculate on the results – i.e. we offer different interpretations or use modal words such as *maybe* or *could* to mitigate our interpretation – and cannot necessarily confirm them by means of the focus group discussion data or by means of follow-up interviews, which may not themselves reveal any 'truth' about the students' perceptions (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005). As a reminder, we position interculturality as a highly political and ideological notion, which is co-constructed by interlocutors. This means that participants might shift from one position to another, introduce new ones and repress others, depending on who they interact with, and how much the presence of others makes/allows position shifts. What is more, this study was considered as exploratory and was not meant to generalize the way Chinese students experience ICE or the role of teachers. We thus felt that two in-depth focus group discussions were comprehensive enough to contribute to this exploratory research on ICE.

Also present during the focus groups were two of us, who mediated 'quietly' the discussions, i.e. the group discussions were open-ended. At the time of the data collection and data analyses, neither was involved in teaching intercultural communication courses taken at the University the students attend. We had the following themes in mind during the discussions: students' background, attitude toward languages and learning, their intercultural (learning) experiences and perceptions of the ideal intercultural communication teacher. Our goal was to let the students talk as much as they wanted and to enter into dialogues with each other. The presence of two of us, who taught in the same institution, probably had an influence on what the students said during the focus group

discussions. We'll discuss this influence if we identify dialogical signs in the data analysis (e.g. a change of position triggered by something we said).

The focus group data were transcribed verbatim by the first and third author independently, and then double checked by each other. In particular, there were a few utterances in Chinese during the interview when the students did not feel like expressing themselves comfortably in English. In those cases, the third author, who is a speaker of Chinese, translated these excerpts into English.

The data were analyzed iteratively. That is, the interview data were first read and re-read by the authors separately to identify relevant excerpts that would inform of the students' perceptions of ICE and teachers' roles. Conversation analysis (CA) transcription rules were adopted in the data transcription (see Appendix). Then the analysis was done through linguistically informed dialogism. Linguistically speaking, dialogism is marked by the apparition of certain linguistic markers or forms: pronouns such as *we*; spatial and temporal deictics; passive voice; tense use (present, conditional); and reported discourses (Maingueneau 2009). Dialogists call reported discourse (direct or indirect) discourse representation as, being reported from another context, it represents discourses and actions. Certain phenomena such as irony, negation and the use of certain discourse markers such as *but* all signal dialogism. Combining through the data for such linguistic phenomena indicative of dialogism, we focused on how these informed of the potential inclusion of the components of the two categories of intercultural perspectives in the students' discourses (see Table 1).

5. Findings

5.1. Clashes of perceptions of intercultural communication?

In this first analytical section, we are interested in the way the students perceive the idea of intercultural communication. We also examine how they relate their views (in-)directly to the courses they have taken. Two full-length excerpts, each from the two focus groups, are analyzed in-depth in this section.

In the first excerpt, the students react to a question by one of us about the accuracy of cultural knowledge passed onto students by teachers or found on, for example, Wikipedia. With this question, we wanted to see how much the students were ready to question Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist ideologies, to reposition themselves and to enter into a debate about what interculturality is about. Before the excerpt, P2 explains that P1 asserts that a lot of intercultural communication has to do with psychology rather than communication. By doing so she uses a dialogical 'trick' through the example they were given in class about a Japanese communicating with an American who may avoid eye contact, leading the American to think that the Japanese is lying or not being sincere. So indirectly she is quoting the authority of the teacher who provided them with this example to support his own argument.

Excerpt 1.[1]

01. P1: no (.) this kind of behavior is sometimes influenced by culture (0.3) you =

02. mention psychology like when someone is lying her eyeball will turn to the =

03. left or what kind of directions that is psychology (0.5) and why are you =

04. denying you don't have that chance to be invited in the business =

05. negotiation (0.4)

05. P4: [we may have but not all of us may have (0.2) and because (.)

06. P1: [So why are you not so confident you have a bright future

07. P4: [no that's (0.2) > < ↑ I think if we have to if we have that knowledge that =

08. we have in that ↑ course into an important stage I think (.)

[F1_589-597]

Excerpt 1 starts with P1's reference to behavioral traits and culture (lines 1–5). These utterances could also imply P1 is making dialogical references to the work of Hall's (1959) low-context and high-context interpretation of culture, through verbal and non-verbal communication, a form of intercultural knowledge which is clearly culturalist-differentialist. It is important to remember Hall's work remains popular yet controversial in the field of intercultural communication (Holliday 2011). This description of behavioral characteristics may be explained by the instructional design of the intercultural communication course the students had participated in or by the theoretical positioning made by the course teacher. P1's utterances were characterized by many substantiated pauses, following one of these pauses, P1 utters '(0.5) and why are you denying you don't have that chance to be invited in the business negotiation' (lines 3–5). Here, P1 articulates her stance that one of the fundamental purposes of the course is to train students to take part in future business negotiations. P1 thus indexes beliefs about their own understanding of the course and how it might be useful for their own career. These utterances are juxtaposed to P4 who utters, 'we may have but not all of us may have (0.2)' (line 5). P1 then contests P4's utterances further by saying 'So why are you not so confident you have a bright future' (line 6). Here, the word 'future' suggests P1 sees perceptions about intercultural communication as being important for her future career mobility and that these ideas run contrary to P4's beliefs. Yet, from P1's previous utterances that potentially the way they view intercultural communication (in the possible references to Hall) can be viewed as culturalist and perhaps simplistic (Dervin 2016). This may mark culturalism as the previous behavioral characteristics P1 made reference to earlier (lines 1–5) might not have anything to do with culture at all. P4 is surprised by P1 here which is marked in their subsequent utterances, '[no that's (0.2) > < ↑ I think if we have to if we have that knowledge that' (line 7). Speaker 4 starts by saying no then their speech quickens (demarcated by the sign > <) and they speak in a louder intonation demarcated by the sign ↑) subsequently their utterances are disjointed and do not make much sense. Clearly, P4 is destabilized by P1's utterances in that they are hesitant in replying. Here, P1 and P4 potentially reflect different ideological positions in how they perceive intercultural communication (this may be due to different world views, experiences, values and so on).

Excerpt 1 shows that career mobility is an important aspect in understanding student perceptions about intercultural communication. Because the students are Business English majors at a University that specializes in Finance and Economics that may in part explain why they felt it was important to talk about business negotiation. However, this also could reflect the theoretical positioning (reference to Hall 1959) made by their teacher. Thus, the interplay between P1 and P4 could index the antagonisms between different approaches to intercultural communication (see 'Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist vs. renewed perspectives). For example, P1 could reflect culturalist models like Hall (1959) and Hofstede (1980), whereas P4 could reflect post-structuralist interpretations (for example, Holliday 2011; Dervin 2016). Here, this could explain why P4 could be seen to reject P1's narrative.

In order to decontextualize student perceptions about intercultural communication further, excerpt 2 shows the student responses when they are asked whether they would take another intercultural communication course.

Excerpt 2.

01. P2b: I would not take another course because I think firstly I do not have =

02. enough time and secondly I think that in (.) China we have little =

03. possibility to communicate with people from different countries (0.3) I think

04. A: [little

05. P2b: [yes because

06. P1b: [do you really think so? I think if you want to work in Shanghai especially =

07. in those foreign investment companies you have to communicate with = 08. foreigners

09. P2b: [Yes but these mostly they come from such as Europe or America and these = 10. you already have some knowledge about the cultural content like

11. P4b: [like drama American drama

12. P2b: [yes you already have some knowledge about that so its not so necessary to=

13. take another course and systematically learn that knowledge

14. B: and you? (0.4)

15. P3b: I quite agree with them I think I do not want to go abroad in the future I will =

16. stay in China and foreigners in China they will learn some etiquette in China =

17. instead of we Chinese learn foreign etiquette.

[F2_346-359]

Excerpt 2 starts with P2b's utterances that she would not take another intercultural communication course and 'in (.) China we have little possibility to communicate with people from different countries (0.3) I think' (lines 2 and 3). Seemingly, 'I think' (line 3) is an afterthought as it is preceded by a pause. This afterthought could be interpreted as hesitancy or a lack of conviction in what the speaker is talking about. Both of these possibilities refer to the refraction of speech by individuals whereby utterances are dialogical in that they are made up of several overlapping voices within the speech of the self (see Marková et al. 2007). These utterances are seemingly contra to the notion that Shanghai is an international city and a hub of the global economy. This notion is contested by speaker A who says 'little' (line 4) which is agreed by P2b 'yes' (line 5). Next, P1b interjects by saying 'do you really think so' (line 6) and P1's responses (line 6 to line 8) marks a shift in the conversation whereby they propose a counter-narrative to P2b's utterances. Here, P2b's utterances seemingly reject perceptions of internationalization and globalization in China, whereas P1b's utterances counter these beliefs. P2b then goes on to justify their stance further by articulating that 'Yes but these mostly they come from such as Europe or America and these you already have some knowledge about the cultural content like' (lines 9 and 10). Here, P2b in a sense acknowledges the mixing of different cultures under the forces of internationalization and globalization yet seemingly they reject fluid notions of identity (for example, Bauman 2004; Dervin 2016) instead they reaffirm fixed and/or solid notions of identity. For example, when P4b interjects by saying 'like American drama' (line 11), P2b agrees with P4b by saying 'yes you already have some knowledge about that so it's not so necessary' (line 12).

These utterances raise a number of interesting points in terms of how intercultural communication is understood by the participants. In a sense, a majority of participants in the two groups believe intercultural communication skills and knowledge can be obtained through watching TV series and movies. This reflects how the students perceive the intercultural communication course as being separate from their own mobility trajectories, this point is illustrated by P3b who says, 'I do not want to go abroad in the future I will stay in China and foreigners in China they will learn some etiquette in China instead of we Chinese learn foreign etiquette' (lines 15–17). These sentiments may be reflected by the student's experiences of the intercultural communication course they undertook, the teaching styles and approaches of their instructor, they could reflect different social and/or ideological factors, or simply make this statement to provoke other participants. As is often the case in research, we do not have access to previous discussions the students had, or access to their relations, which cannot allow us to know for sure what was happening here. In any case, it appears that the student perceptions and beliefs about intercultural communication are inseparable from the notions of mobility and internationalization.

Excerpt 2 shows the interplay of different ideologies about interculturality. In this sense, the excerpt raises a number of points for consideration. Student perceptions about their own mobility and how they view internationalization are separable from how the students view intercultural communication. As was discussed when we reviewed perspectives on IC, the excerpt shows that intercultural is always co-constructed and negotiated by different interlocutors and should be viewed as a dialogue in the making (Dervin 2016). That is not to say a dialogue should result in a consensus. It is the interplay of difference in ideologies and discourses where the self and other can contest meanings (Bakhtin 2012). The excerpt highlights marked differences from the participants in how they view internationalization within China, their own career trajectories and experiences from taking a course on intercultural communication. The excerpt also shows how seemingly some of the students are resistant to notions of intercultural communication.

This excerpt does raise questions in terms of whether the central concept of intercultural competences (one outcome of ICE claimed to be important, see Byram 1997) should be 'acquired' or 'obtained', which can be deeply problematic for two reasons. Firstly, because intercultural competencies are assessed, it raises the question of who is competent? Who is not competent? And, who decides? (Dervin and Gross 2016). The second problematique is that intercultural competencies can be engendered as states of being that some people have and some people do not have, which means intercultural competences can function as a political instrument specifically for 'others' (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers) (Simpson and Dervin 2019a, 2019b). Such instruments can lead to othering whereby 'the self and other is turned into an "other" by using stereotypes, representations, and prejudices. Othering often leads to hierarchizing the world' (Dervin 2016, 115). This vision of interculturality is clearly culturalist-differentialist and poses the problem of power relations in intercultural encounters, which should be balanced through education.

5.2. Who is legitimate to teach ICE?

In this second analytical section, we are interested in the way the students perceive those who teach intercultural communication. We also examine how they relate their views (in-)directly to the intercultural communication experienced they had in the university.

In the third excerpt, the students are asked directly about their 'ideal' intercultural teacher:

Excerpt 3.

01. P4b: I suppose it needs to be a native speaker

02. A: [Why

03. P4b: [when I (.) when I (.) am entering a workplace the people I'm dealing with =

04. must be a native speaker (0.3) I mean (.) I mean (.) when it's just a Chinese =

05. he won't speak English with you while you are having a case

06. A: [Why is it important to speak English (.)

07. P2b: All of the native English teachers ↓ who are not familiar with the case maybe=

08. they just need (0.3) just native

09. P1b: [A native speaker who is not familiar with ↑ our culture

10. P4b: [You mean a native speaker is not familiar with business

11. P2b: [or communication () (0.3)

12. P4b: [I guess we do have teachers that can (.) do have the combination of =

13. business knowledge as well as the native speaker characteristics (0.2) right I =

14. guess we do have the teachers.

[F2_420-432]

Excerpt 3 starts with participant four claiming that the intercultural communication teacher must be a native speaker (line 1). When questioned by Academic A (line 2), Participant 4's (P4b) response (lines 3–5) is very hesitant as it contains many micro pauses, more substantiated pauses (line 4) and repetitions of 'when I' (line 3) and 'I mean' (line 4). In their response, P4b utters the word 'case' (line 5), at this stage in the conversation, it is unsure what is meant by the word case, yet, Academic A does not question what is meant by 'case' instead she questions why it is important to speak English (line 6). Here, the group identity in the conversation is indexed through, firstly, the interjections by Participant 2 (P2b) and then by Participant 1 (P1b) and P4b. P2b tries to aide P1b by their response (lines 7 and 8) yet the decrease in intonation marked by the symbol ↓ (line 7) could indicate the speaker does not have conviction in what they are saying. Yet, P2b uses the repetition of the intensifier 'just' (line 8) to repair this assumption. The following interjection by P1b marks an ideological refraction in the conversation (Bakhtin 2012; Vološinov [1929] 1985). P1b with an increase in intonation utters that 'A native speaker who is not familiar with ↑ our culture' (line 9), here, particular emphasis is stressed with an increase in intonation on the word 'our'. Here, the word 'our' could relate to a notion of identity perceived by the speaker which may have been justified as an excuse for 'misunderstandings' (see Dervin 2016 who articulates how culture is often used as an excuse or alibi). P4b then utters a further refraction by making the link between culture and business, 'you mean a native speaker is not familiar with business' (line 10). P2b then utters 'or communication () (0.3)' (line 11), here, the inaudible utterances '()' and the substantiated pause '(0.3)' allows for P4 to rearticulate their utterances though shifting away from their previous utterances (lines 3–5). The repetition of 'I guess we do have' (lines 12 and14) in addition to the pause '(0.2)' followed by the word 'right' (line 13) shows how the speaker is perhaps trying to convince their self and the audience that it does not matter if the teacher is a native speaker or not. However, this reaccentuation by P4b might be used to hide their beliefs as they did not anticipate being questioned by participant A.

This short dialogue shows that speaker utterances about who is an ideal teacher of IC are constantly interacting and refracting during meaning-making processes between interlocutors (Bakhtin 2012; Vološinov [1929] 1985). The shifts from 'culture' (line 9) to 'business' (line 10) to 'communication' (line 11) shows that within the self *raznorechie* (differing ideological viewpoints, discourses) is continuously co-constructing identities and power relations in terms of how language is expressed and performed by the speakers through *raznoiazychie* (plurality of national languages, dialects and so forth). It is important to remember that the participants are business English students, so these ideological refractions may denote some of the course contents they have experienced in marketing, accounting and other business fields.

In the entire data, no mention is ever made of foreign teachers of intercultural communication, since the courses on the topic were all taught by Chinese teachers when the data were collected. In the following excerpt, however, the students discuss the case of a Russian teacher who taught them accounting, which we think could hint at the perception of different kinds of teachers.

Excerpt 4.

01. A: One thing (.) many of your courses if not all of your courses have been =

02. taught by somebody who is not a native speaker of English

03. P1: [Yeah.

04. A: [Do you think that being native is an important aspect (0.4)

05. P1: [Sometimes it is important because

06. P2: [The pronunciation

07. P1: [Yeah the pronunciation

08. P2: [such as we had accounting last semester (0.3) the teacher is very cute and =

09. nice but we can't understand what he said

10. P1/3/4/: [Yeah

11. P1: [Because he is from Russia

12. P2: [Yes he has an accent and we had difficulty in understanding what s/he said

13. P1: [Yeah in the first class I nearly cannot understand ↑ anything:::

14. P2: [Yes only several words.

[F1_202-226]

Excerpt 4 starts with the utterances of participant A (lines 1 and 2). Here, the statement by participant A functions in building shared knowledge and shared relationships between the rest of the participants in the conversation. P1 shows agreement by the utterance 'yeah' (line 3). When participant A asks if it is important to be taught by someone who is a native speaker of English (line 4) which is followed by a lengthy pause (0.4) (line 4). This pause is used strategically by P1 and P2 in which they jointly co-construct their stances and identity in the conversation. P2 utters 'the pronunciation' (line 6) which is agreed by P1 'yeah the pronunciation' (line 7). P2 then goes on to describe their understanding about native speakers through describing their experiences about the Russian teacher (0.3) 'very cute and nice' (lines 8 and 9). Here, the speakers utter the intensifier 'very' to describe the teacher before stating that she is Russian. These sentiments are agreed by the other participants illustrated by P1/3/4 uttering 'yeah' (line 10). Here, participants are managing the conversation to potentially avoid instances which might cause threats to their face by giving the hedged description about the teacher before stating she is Russian illustrated by P1 saying 'because he is from Russia' (line 11). Here, face is understood as

> the actions taken by a person to make whatever [s]he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract 'incidents' – that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face (Goffman 2005, 8).

Here, the participants managing of the conversation could be oriented toward the native speaker asking the questions in the dialogue. The participants could be minimizing any threats to their face, for example, through saying something which might cause offence or be embarrassing. However, in this instance, the orientation toward native-speakerism also functions as a projection of how the participants view language. P2 goes on to utter 's/he has an accent' (line 12), yet, surely every speaker of English has some form of accent? Or was it that P2 expected or wanted a different accent? This point can be further emphasized by P1 uttering 'understand ↑ anything:::' (line 13), here, the word *anything* was stressed with a higher intonation and the ending of the word was stretched/elongated to put a heightened sense of importance on the word.

This excerpt could show that the participants were carefully engaged in managing the conversation whilst also co-constructing their speaker identities and positions. This was achieved through bringing the Russian teacher into the conversation to illustrate their conceptualization of native-speakerism. Yet, P1's use of the word 'accent' which was supplemented by P2's utterings about not understanding anything might infer some ideological refractions about how English language is understood and expressed by the participants, or more specifically, how the participants would like to encounter and express English themselves. In analyzing the ideological refraction of the speakers' utterances, one must also consider the fact that the students are Business English Majors at a University specializing in Finance and Economics. Therefore, the speakers' stances must be decontextualized from wider social and economic factors and influences.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Students' perceptions of ICE are an under-researched topic, in China and globally. Often, research has examined student performance as intercultural communicators during and after courses, rather than discussing their perceptions of interculturality as an ideological construct. Our article contributes to fill in this gap by examining how Chinese business English students perceive both the idea of ICE and the ideal teacher for it. From our dialogical analysis, it is easy to see that, after taking a course on IC, the students' discourses are crossed by varied opinions and ideologies, and that there does not appear to be a coherent and consistent way of discussing the intercultural. We found both Eurocentric culturalist-differentialist perspectives and renewed aspects in what the students said. The various components of these perspectives that we presented in Table 1 appear to be 'mixed and matched' in what the discourses the students negotiated, no coherent assemblage of these components was identified. In her work on ICE in Finland, Tournebise (2012) had found very similar results for IC teachers. It might thus not be so surprising that students themselves don't/cannot position their views on IC in a coherent way. As far as the ideal teacher is concerned, our paper highlights signs of the native/non-native teacher dichotomy, in relation to ICE. However, as the students had not taken courses on intercultural communication with a non-Chinese teacher, our result must be considered carefully. In any case, through our dialogical analysis, we have hinted repeatedly at the fact that IC teachers could have an influence on how students discuss IC.

For teachers and students alike, questioning and problematizing different ideologies and discourses about interculturality requires one to critically reflect upon the self and others in communication. For Bakhtin (2012), language use always reflects the self–other relationship. Bakhtin's concept of *Raznorechie* ('Heteroglossia' in English) acknowledges the coexistence of a multiplicity of various struggling language-forms and voices within the self (Bakhtin 2012). To paraphrase one of Bakhtin's famous lines, we live in a world of others' words, meaning all utterances are co-constructed and negotiated with others, no word is exclusively our own (Bakhtin 2012)).

Within ICE, reflexivity has been proposed as a critical perspective which allows the self and other to be constantly understood as being under conditions of constant negotiation (Dervin 2015, 2016). François Laplantine's proposal (2013, 30) is also relevant to what we are trying to achieve in the multifaceted field of interculturality. For the anthropologist, research should consist in (but also lead to) permanent criticality, confusion, perplexity and complexity to reflect our contemporary worlds (Dervin 2015, 136). Michel Maffesoli (2013) adds that current sociological research shows that 'the spirit of the times is no longer of subjectivism, but an outflow of self, a loss in the other' (Dervin 2015, 141). Bakhtin's (2012) work can offer a site to rework the self–other relationship in research. We believe that such ideas deserve to be explored fully in the provision of ICE, in China and elsewhere, to support students' reflexivity and criticality in relation to IC. As we have seen, interculturality cannot but be ideological and political and it is thus important for those who teach and learn about it to develop tools that can help them identify the (hidden) ideologies and agendas behind intercultural perspectives. We thus ask for some form of critical literacy for ICE to be central in the way IC teachers are trained. Such meta-approach to ICE (it is not about teaching about IC but looking at ICE from a distance) could make students aware of the role of education in shaping their own ideological and political views about the world. Knowledge about self and other in relation to the intercultural is problematic as it often positions them in static ways. What ICE should offer to Higher Education students is to learn to consider such knowledge critically and to accept/revise/reject the ideologies that lie behind it. These are important implications for IC teachers in order to allow different perspectives and ideas to be contested by all interlocutors within specific contexts. In this sense, Bakhtin (2012) and Vološinov's ([1929] 1985) work can illuminate these experiences and interactions by continually problematizing what is meant by language and (intercultural) communication, whilst at the same time, their approach can serve as a critical tool in decontextualizing ideologies within ICE.

Notes

1. The conversation analyses used follows Jefferson's (1985) approach. A detailed explanation of the symbols used can be found in the Appendix. All excerpts are presented as verbatim without any attempt to correct speaker utterances. In the excerpts, 'A' and 'B' refers to the academics. P1 notes participant 1, P2 notes participant 2 and so forth.

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Appendix. Transcription symbols

(.) A full stop inside brackets denotes a micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length.
(0.2) A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause. This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription.
[Square brackets denote a point where overlapping speech occurs.
> < Arrows surrounding talk like these show that the pace of the speech has quickened
< > Arrows in this direction show that the pace of the speech has slowed down
() Where there is space between brackets denotes that the words spoken here were too unclear to transcribe
(()) Where double brackets appear with a description inserted denotes some contextual information where no symbol of representation was available.
↑ When an upward arrow appears, it means there is a rise in intonation
↓ When a downward arrow appears, it means there is a drop in intonation
= The equal sign represents latched speech, a continuation of talk
:: Colons appear to represent elongated speech, a stretched sound.